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Inside Pandora's Box: Anatomy of a Used Book Sale

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Closing that equation isn't as simple as it might seem, though. For any rep who's not simply going through the motions, the step of "asking for business" only comes after a series of others, most of them well before the call itself. The rep should have found out as much as possible about the library ahead of time, should have begun emailing and talking with the librarian prior to the call, and should have a good idea before walking into the building what configuration of services would make sense for this particular library. During the call itself the best vendor reps, in this same spirit of inquiry, will ask questions and listen at least as much as they talk.

For the librarian, it means remaining open to the possibility that there might be a better way of doing things than the way they're being done. Every rep who's allowed in the door should be given an honest chance to wreak havoc, to blow up the status quo. I say this with all due respect, knowing that for good reason it usually won't happen, and will happen rarely indeed on any first call. But the possibility should be there, and that means that the librarian needs to know the library's status quo inside and out, what's working well, and at what price, what's not working, and why. The librarian also should know as much as possible about the vendor landscape, the rep's firm as well as the competition, and so should be able to ask good questions, including the ones a rep might rather not be asked.

Maybe the librarian agrees to give the rep some business. If the new arrangement turns out to be a lasting one, everyone's ahead, a good call for sure. But even when the rep comes away with no new business, maybe the rep has learned something about the library or about the competition. Or maybe the librarian's comments about the rep's own company can be put to use back at headquarters. Or maybe the rep and librarian hit it off personally, and can help one another in the future. So even when it's not a "good call" for the rep, it's not necessarily a bad call either.

DN: I've always been willing to give a vendor a chance with a trial on a certain number of orders or journal subscriptions. Working with my Acquisitions staff, we'll send the orders and then track them. Sometimes the trial is very successful and we continue to do business with that vendor. But sometimes it turns out to be a real nightmare. But to go back to what you said earlier about the vendor rep staying focused on the essential aspect of getting business, and for the librarian to respect it, you should remember that all libraries are not created equal and that many of us have certain parameters that we have to work within. I'm talking about public institutions and others that have to go out on bid for vendors and those that have no real monies to spend with several different vendors. **Carnegie Mellon** is lucky to be a private institution and we can order materials from just about anyplace we need to.

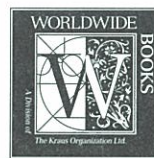
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BN: That's true, of course. Good point, **Denise**, that some libraries will be a long-term project for the rep, and will call for a series of calls. And speaking of nightmares, that's exactly what it is for any conscientious rep, too, when the home office

doesn't deliver as promised. Having to go back into the library and make things right, as best you can, is not the kind of call a rep looks forward to. But that's a story in itself, for another time--about when things go wrong. 🌿

Inside Pandora's Box — Anatomy of a Used Book Sale

by **Pat Ditzler** and **JoAnn Dumas**

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University) <Jack.Montgomery@wku.edu>



Editor's Note: *this is the second in the series concerning creative ideas in library gifts management. Upon hearing of the success of Ms Ditzler and Ms Dumas, I decided to contact them and let them tell their story. Pat Ditzler has twice chaired the huge Lancaster, Pa. book sale and has worked on the sale for 16 years in various capacities. A retired accountant, Pat puts her corporate business experience to use in the Survival Kit, as well as to her other library volunteer efforts. JoAnn Dumas used the knowledge gained from the Lancaster book sales to start a book sale in Potsdam, New York. The Survival Kit documents Potsdam's journey to success. JoAnn has chaired the Potsdam, New York, book sale for the past two years. As a retired bank Branch Manager, she also brings valuable business skills to The Survival Kit. — JM*

Anatomy of a Used Book Sale

Could your local library use an extra \$85,000 this year? That's the amount of money raised at the **Lancaster Area Library Annual Book Sale** held last May.

A Harvest Book Sale, Internet sales, and our year-round book store in the **Lancaster Duke Street Library** brought the fund raising total to \$115,000 for the year, and a cumulative \$1 Million since our sale began 45 years ago. The first sale in 1955 yielded \$153, and the proceeds are growing at an ever-increasing rate. With library funding competing for state and federal dollars, the funds raised by volunteers can make a world of difference in the type of services libraries can offer to the public.

Book Donations

Over 95% of the books we sell come from community donations. The other 5% are withdrawn outdated volumes from the library's permanent collection. The five trucks packed with books that we took to this year's May sale weighed in at 57,000 pounds, a lot of books donated by the public! So now we've got a tremendous amount of books to sell from all the wondrous donations. Here's how we go about organizing a successful book sale.

Storing and Sorting Books

The first requirement is a safe, dry, heated place to store and sort the book donations. We have a rented warehouse facility that

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meets our needs. Next, you need an organized system to sort the books and some dedicated, trained volunteers to do the sorting into categories. Sorting books is not for the faint-hearted. It is truly addictive and looking at all those lovely books to sort can cause heart palpitations, anxiety attacks, and fits of passion. Other than raking in cash at our sales, sorting is truly the most fun part of the sale.

One reason our sale has become so lucrative is the specialized training we give our volunteer book sorters. With the volunteer help of a local bookstore owner, we have learned to separate collectibles for higher pricing. An alphabetized listing of desirable books that will sell at a premium is posted for our volunteers. The list, of course, is ever-changing based on market conditions. We currently sort books into 39 categories, from Arts and Literature, History, Psychology, Religion, Travel, Gardening, Mystery, Westerns, and so forth.

Volunteers

The sale runs smoothly because of the hundreds of volunteers from the **Friends of the Library** that help us year after year. We sort books and price the collectibles all year long. This is a huge effort, with a resulting total of over 2,700 sorted boxes to take to the sale. Then there's the set-up at a local roller-rink the day before the sale and hundreds of hours during the sale and the cleanup following the sale.. A true community effort happens in Lancaster!

Publicity

We have a mailing list that we've developed over the years of library donors, dealers and other shoppers who've attended the sale in prior years and asked to be notified about future sales, and county-wide bookstore owners. Flyers with details of the sale are mailed. In addition we are on the Internet on **BookSaleFinder.com**, a free place to advertise non-profit organizations' book sales. This Internet connection brings us customers from around the country. In talking with customers at our sale, we find that many people plan their vacations around our sale. While it would be difficult to track, we know that our book sales also bring monetary benefits to our community in the form of restaurant, hotel, tourist attraction, and store revenues.

Sale Set-up

The book sale was held at the **Lancaster Library** for the first forty years, and we did disrupt the library's normal activities a bit. But there was a great connection and a raised awareness of the library's role in the community when we sold books in the midst of the library bookshelves. Because the sale kept growing, five years ago we were forced to find a larger facility for the annual sale. We finally settled on **Overlook Roller Rink**, a local skating rink.

"If You Have A Book Sale, They Will Come!"

The doors open promptly at 7 A.M., and the shoppers keep up a steady flow all day long until our 9 P.M. closing. The first day, as you might expect, the really great collectible books get snapped up. Our prices are fair and the shoppers know these bargain books won't last long. The sheer volume of books we have ensures a great selection for all three days of the sale. During the sale, besides the truly satisfied shoppers in the collectible section who found that Civil War book they craved, or the autographed first editions, there are heart-warming scenes and stories. The Amish mother's brood of children lined up under one of the Children's books tables, engrossed in their new books. Or the mystery novel devotee searching for, and finding that **Agatha Christie** book missing from his tattered reference list. And the shopper who wonders aloud, "WHO is buying and donating all these **Danielle Steele** novels?" The sellers love to help the little boy in line with a wadded-up dollar bill clenched in his fist in payment for his two books he specially selected. And what a joy to see a family with four children delighted to get an encyclopedia set for \$15.00. Friends, who haven't seen each other since last year's book sale, catch up on family news. The sale is a great social event in Lancaster! On this third day of the sale all books are sold at half-price. Shoppers who had their eyes on books the first two days come back to get bargains. Once again, the parking lot and rink are jammed with bargain hunters, and sales are brisk. Then, about 3 P.M. we start selling the fifty-cent books for \$2.00 a grocery bagful. The specially priced books are sold at 75% off. Books continue to fly out the door until the sale ends at 6 P.M. Once the sale closes to the public, we do invite local non-profit agencies to come and select books for their organization's libraries. Finally, volunteers

pack up the leftovers with the help of a local **Boy Scout** troop and leaders. The **Scouts**, as a community project and fund raiser, help us clean up and also take the scrapped books, remove any hardback covers, and sell the paper for recycling. At the **Lancaster Book Sale** everyone's a winner. The volunteers feel great about helping the library and the community. The library benefits tremendously by getting funds so badly needed. The shoppers go home clutching their treasures and counting the days until next year's book sale, when they can touch, feel, smell, and purchase that delightful delicacy known as the used book.

To help other libraries on the road to lucrative book sales, we have written **The Book Sale Survival Kit**. This spiral-bound manual is a hands-on, systematic approach to book sale success. Two years ago, the **Lancaster Library** used their extensive book sale knowledge to help the Potsdam, New York, **Friends of the Library** start a small book sale modeled after Lancaster's huge sale. Potsdam's book sale revenue grew from several hundred dollars a year to over \$6,000 in the first year. Success with the sale in Potsdam proved the value of sharing this information with others. The **Survival Kit** contains forms, press releases, and resource information. Also included in the manual are discussions on expanding book-selling opportunities, such as Internet sales and year-round bookstores.

The **Book Sale Survival Kit** can be ordered through Treetops Press, 107 Treetops Drive, Lancaster, Pa. 17601. Cost is \$25.00 per manual, which includes book rate shipping. You can also email us at <treetopspress@aol.com> for queries or to place an order.

The Lancaster and Potsdam libraries will share in the profits from the **Book Sale Survival Kit**. Coming Next: Consignment Sales! 🐾

Something About Books

by **Jack Walsdorf** (Library Relations, Alibris)
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Perhaps it's simply the time of the year; spring is in the air, the outfield grass is green and thought turns to the great American pastime of baseball.

In my own case, spring fever started in the cold of January during a conversation at the **Alibris** booth at **ALA**. As so often happens, general talk turned to booktalk, and mention was made of **Doris Kearns Goodwin's** memoir *Wait Till Next Year* (Simon & Schuster 1997). Had I read it? My "no" turned the asker into a mild state of challenge. "You just must read it, wonderful book. I've given away at least five copies. Family,

people at work. I thrust it on them. Get it and tell me what you think of it at **ALA** summer in San Francisco."

My search on **Alibris** turned up lots of copies for sale, over 100, with a signed first in hardback at \$58.50. I got a modestly priced first for \$10. And what a truly wonderful book it is. If you grew up during the late 1940's or early 50's, and if you don't really care about baseball, but do care about growing up, family, tradition, love and values, you will like this book. Told as perhaps only a historian and lover of the game can tell it,

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